

EDG
Written by General Lord of the
Royal Engineers, & presented
by Lt. Col. Lord to Wharfedale

S E R M O N .

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The charitable Inhabitants of Dover are solicited
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S E R M O N ,

which (though possessing no merit beyond the pure intention of administering consolation to the unfortunate) is printed for the benefit of the poor Widows of the Seamen who perished in the storm of Nov. 5, 1810.

SERMON.

Job, Chap. v, Verse 17.

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.

NO man, accustomed to reflect and reason on the afflictions to which human nature is liable, either by the permission or direct will of a divine Providence, and who, in his own person, has experienced the loss of fortune, the death of his dearest relatives, and (to complete his misery) the wasting ravage of disease, will endeavour to augment his wretchedness, by an impious and unavailing complaint of the in-

justice or partiality of God's inscrutable decrees. A man who has thus suffered, if he possess that wisdom of reflection, of which I suppose him capable in the outset, will rather seek to divert his ideas from the contemplation of such overwhelming misery; he will see the folly of building on the enjoyment of the gifts of fortune, so often snatched from us without a moment's warning; he will bend with resignation, (though not without a bitter sigh) at the fiat which deprived him of domestic and endearing converse; and he will contrast his state of bodily suffering with that of some one still more heavily afflicted, and thus extract the balm of comfort from the comparison. I would ask you, whether such dreadful visitations as I have just described, are not likely, in a just and meditating breast, to produce the above reflections? whether, when the futile prospects of this transitory scene are fast receding from our view; when no chance of consolation remains but in the true philo-

sophy of resignation; and when even Hope, that bright and cheering star which forsakes not the miserable culprit in his cell, displays her enlivening ray to his imagination, only to gild the prospect of “another and a better world,” he will not be likely to exclaim in the words of the text, *Behold happy is the man whom God correcteth : therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty ?*

This was the language of consolation addressed to Job by one of his friends, at a period when this excellent and pious man was suffering the most severe of all human trials. Scripture informs us, that he was the greatest of all the men of the East ; his substance and household were very great ; he had a numerous family, who “ continually” experienced his parental solicitude ; and above all, “ he was a perfect and upright man, and one that feared God and eschewed evil.” This is a picture of human happiness rarely indeed to

be met with, the possession of which we can hardly conceive could be relinquished without the sacrifice of that fortitude so necessary to support us in cases of uncommon calamity. Yet we behold this inimitable example of humility, avowedly abandoned to the temptation of sin: incited to apostacy by his own wife; reduced to the lowest state of poverty and privation; bereft of all his children, and harassed by the well-meant and injurious reasoning of his friends, steadily resigned to the will of his Creator, and urging every argument that could be inspired by a confidence in God, to repel the attacks that were levelled at his constancy.

It is a remark with us of the present day, that misfortunes seldom come alone, and in some instances the observation may be justified. The diminution or loss of fortune, the death of several members of a family, or the illness of a still greater proportion, may all occur within a short

period ; but however sad this example may appear, the evil is not yet complete : *something* is still preserved as a means of supporting life ; a wife, or a beloved child, is restored to you ; or a prospect of returning health directs your grateful heart to the contemplation of happier days ; yet, I regret to say, it is not uncommon, that under circumstances far less distressing than those I have enumerated, the man who is unsupported by the sentiments of true religion, and deficient in that confidence in the Supreme Being, which should form the basis of all his resolutions, attacked on a sudden by distresses so complicated, yields without a struggle to their overwhelming influence, and falls a sacrifice either by the temerity of his own hand, or the slower operations of despondency and want of firmness. How different, how strikingly different, the example of Job, both in his sufferings and conduct ! None of those gradations by which a man descends from the sphere of opulence to

indigence : none of those humane and friendly precautions, which prepares the mind for fatal intelligence, awaited him ; the tempest fell on his devoted head ere he could anticipate even the thought of evil ; it came like the winter torrent from the mountains, which leaves no vestige but the disfigured wreck of nature ; in an instant he was deprived of every thing that could make life desirable ; but instead of sinking beneath the awful stroke, instead of yielding to the first impulse of despair, he raised his soul to God, and broke silence in that most beautiful effusion, the very perfection of humility and resignation to the divine will, “ Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither ; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

These words, even in our language, convey a feeling, that raises the mind to the most refined and exalted pitch of

contemplative devotion, while they excite an admiration of the sufferer, that surpasses all common emotion. The version, though probably as literal as it can be made to suit a prose translation, is still poetical; and by those who are sufficiently acquainted with the native tongue in which it was first poured forth, it is justly considered one of the most beautiful and pathetic specimens of Oriental Poetry.

I dwell with peculiar interest and satisfaction on the history of this truly great and good man, during his state of severe trial, because I feel satisfied there are few points of his conduct which I may not safely set before you for imitation, as a support in those moments, when it shall please the Almighty to afflict you with any of the evils inseparable from the lot of frail humanity. I can hardly except the desire of death which he occasionally manifests, at a time when disease was aggravating all the horrors of his recol-

lection; and the disposition with which he endeavoured to reconcile the most poignant misery, was perverted by the cold and unmerited reproofs of his friends. Urged by the extremity of suffering, and unconscious of the manner in which he had offended his Creator, his complaints partake of that spirit of justification which is naturally inspired by innocence; and though it appears they gave just offence, and drew forth rebuke, first from his companion, and afterwards in a direct address from the Deity, the reproof went no further than to correct this single instance of his presumption, which was instantly acknowledged in the most humble and contrite terms, and restored him at once to the favor and approbation of the Almighty.

We may hence conclude, that this venial trait of imperfection so readily pardoned by God, formed no part of his real character. Visited as he was by

a combination of the most dreadful calamities, it cannot be matter of surprise to us, that he should betray an intemperance of supplication, and a disgust of life, which occasionally characterize his expostulations, and which, as far as I can perceive, constitute his only fault. From this trait in the character of Job, I trust you will not fail to derive instruction.

It would ill become me, who by my office am bound to set truth before your eyes, either to apologize for the frailties of human nature by false reasoning, or to neglect the means of soothing and mitigating those scenes of anxiety and distress which daily, nay hourly, afflict so large a proportion of the inhabitants of this fleeting world: rather let me present the only true and efficacious source of consolation that can possibly avail you in such an extremity. The first lesson inculcated in the history of Job, is the necessity of a patient endurance of suffering, by whatever

means it may please God to afflict you. If therefore you should suffer in your substance (by which is meant the loss or diminution of fortune) consider whether your own imprudence may not have been in some degree the cause. View the evil in its proper light; take a lesson from the effects of adversity, and endeavour to retrieve your circumstances by a laudable and strict economy. Put also to your heart these questions: Might not the event have been worse? Is there no unhappy creature, though less deserving of such a fate than myself, who now pines in indigence, while I have still sufficient to satisfy the wants of nature? Should your slight acquaintance with the sons of woe withhold from your remembrance so sad an instance of misfortune, remember Job; and that he, from the very height of affluence, descended at once to the utmost depths of wretchedness.

But the loss of wealth falls light, when

compared with some evils to which we are ever liable. It is dreadful to outlive those who are most dear to us ; and we are absorbed in anguish that experiences no alleviation, because it is the lot of man to suffer, when we lose a wife, a husband, a parent, or our tender offspring. Here alas ! our whole resolution must be summoned, to stem the torrent of overwhelming grief. The mind, in such cases, delights in the indulgence of that sad and melancholy reflection, which resists its restoration to vigor and tranquility ; and unless aided by the wholesome admonitions of religion, and the influence of that reason which sets bounds to the dominion of sorrow, loses all its energy, and communicates the contagion to the body, which soon becomes unfit for all the social offices of life. Beware, therefore, of this pleasing but dangerous indulgence, lest it produce a relaxation or abandonment of those duties, which form the bond and happiness of society, and the

exercise of which alone entitles you to the kind offices of those about you. It may chance, that you are still blessed with the intercourse of one you love; that you still receive the balm of consolation from a tender friend; or that the filial tear of a remaining child falls not in vain to share and mitigate your sorrow. Happy thou, in this instance, to possess such a treasure! Consider that, in this sad and dreary stage of your probation, you might have sighed for such in vain. Your joy, your hope, your tenderness, might have been centered in this one object, and in that loss, you would have been bereft of all. Thank God, however, this is not your case. Heaven, in its bounty, has left you one source of consolation, and time may yet restore you to a sense of many blessings. If you now think your case hard; if you still repine at the dispensations of the Almighty, and presumptuously reject the proffer of his kindness, in the grateful acknowledgment

of what he still permits you to enjoy ; compare your lot with that of Job, and (with but a small portion of his merit) pronounce your own unworthiness. He, like you, had many children, the joy and comfort of his years ; but not one was left to soothe him in all his sufferings. In the same moment that he was informed of the total ruin of his substance, he received intelligence, (to a father still more dreadful) that his children in the unsuspecting moment of mirth and enjoyment, were all destroyed. Tell me, in this comparison, if thou hast not cause for joy ; and may we not find some excuse for the deserted Job, when he exclaimed, in the anguish of his heart, “ O that I
 “ were as in months past, as in the
 “ days when God preserved me, when
 “ his candle shined upon my head, and
 “ when by his light I walked through
 “ darkness ; as I was in the days of
 “ my youth, when my children were about
 “ me.”

There is yet another case, in which the example of this excellent man cannot fail to inspire you with confidence in God, and a cheerful acquiescence in his divine dispensations. When he had endured for some time the heavy afflictions which have been already enumerated; when Satan perceived, that his integrity was not to be shaken by the most malicious exercise of infernal invention, he again obtained permission from God, to try how far disease, superadded to his other sufferings, would operate on the pious resolutions of his undaunted soul. We may now view him under the influence of this horrid scourge, exerting, with unceasing torment, its deadly power, to deprive him of that strength, which in a worldly sense, was now the only source of consolation left to him, "sitting among the ashes," in the lowest state of wretchedness. In this forlorn situation, when the smallest effort of domestic sympathy would have fortified the noble purpose of his soul, he was

wounded in the defection of his own wife, who, representing God as the author of all his sufferings, thus impiously strove to shake his fidelity: “Dost thou still retain
 “thine integrity?” said she, “Curse God,
 “and die.” Weary of life, and, as we read in the sequel, anxious for that change which could alone relieve him, with a faltering tongue he exclaims, “Where-
 “fore is light given to him that is in
 “misery, and life to the bitter in soul?
 “which long for death, but it cometh not,
 “and dig for it more than hid treasures;
 “which rejoice exceedingly and are glad
 “when they can find the grave.” When, I repeat, we view him in this state, and are waiting the reply he is to make to his wife, should we be astonished, if we did not know his history, to have heard him arraign the unmerited fate of innocence, and murmur at the dispensations of the Almighty? In trials far less severe, how apt are we to betray our impatience; and how often do we find ourselves

tempted to question the justice of that inscrutable Providence, which suffers the wicked to prosper, while the good are weighed down by adverse fate.

Let us then reconcile the evils of life with the same wisdom and devotion which immortalize the speech of Job, when he answered his apostate wife; "What, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Well may it be said, "In all this, Job did not sin with his lips." The expression, however, is a mere truism, and is not of a nature to mark our admiration of his excellence. At the time of this dreadful suffering, he remembered what he *had* been; he felt, that the happy state he once enjoyed was dispensed by the same power that now afflicted him, and in that prompt and almost cheerful reply, which will perpetuate his dignified resignation to the latest posterity, he expressed his unwillingness to doubt the justice of that decree, which

had humbled him to the most degrading state in nature.

Lose not then, I beseech you, the advantage of this invaluable lesson in the conduct of Job; and when on the bed of sickness, and the prospect of that awful hour before you, which sooner or later *must* arrive, let your heart be raised in joyful confidence to God. He alone can save; He alone reward your virtue. Whether it be destined, that this fleeting scene be about to pass for ever from before your eyes, only that you may experience somewhat sooner the enjoyments of a blessed eternity; or, that you are permitted still to live, and, like Job, as an earthly recompense for all his trials, be restored to the highest gratifications of this sublunary state; what I ask, have you to care? In the former case, you will have the greater cause for joy, and ample reason to rejoice at the prospect of being speedily removed from the cares

and disappointments of a vexatious world ; in the latter, you will have some leisure before the awful summons to contemplate the chequered lot of humanity, the value of your present enjoyments will be enhanced by the recollection of your past sufferings ; neither too much elated by prosperity, nor depressed by the frowns of fortune, you will be taught to value justly the gifts of Providence ; and reverting (as you unquestionably will do) to the history of that great and good example which I have set before you this day, you will exclaim, in the sincerity and gratitude of your heart, “ *Happy is the man whom God correcteth ; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.* ”